

Introduction:

- A. The great American writer, **John Updike**, died recently. All his life he vacillated between Christian faith and doubt. However, quite early in his career he wrote a poem for a religious arts festival sponsored by the Clifton Lutheran Church, of Marblehead, Mass. The poem was called, "Seven Stanzas at Easter." It is extraordinary. Listen to the first four stanzas:

*Make no mistake: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.*

*It was not as the flowers,
each soft Spring recurrent;
it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled
eyes of the eleven apostles;
it was as His flesh: ours.*

*The same hinged thumbs and toes,
the same valved heart
that—pierced—died, withered, paused, and then
regathered out of enduring Might
new strength to enclose.*

*Let us not mock God with metaphor,
analogy, sidestepping, transcendence;
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the
faded credulity of earlier ages:
let us walk through the door.*

- B. The literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a door we must walk through. On the other side of that door is our own hope of resurrection, but much more. Today, as we continue our study of 1 Cor. 15, I want to show you more of what lies beyond the door of the resurrection. Turn to **1 Cor. 15:20-32**

I. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS THE DOOR TO ALL GOD HAS PLANNED FOR THE WORLD TO COME (15:20-28)

- A. First, the resurrection is the door to a re-created humanity (vv.20-22). When Adam sinned it was like a spiritually mutant death gene was introduced into his line, and every son or daughter of Adam since then has been infected with sin that doomed us to death. But Jesus, as fully human as we are—as completely Adam-ized, died in our place. As the Son of God he was of infinite value, capable of standing in for all other human beings when he died and rose again. And when he rose from the grave, it was God making an eighth day of creation. Here was a new Adam, a new Father of a new kind of humanity. **People immune to the powers of sin and death.**

V.20 says that Christ was "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." The Jews celebrated the ingathering of the spring harvest by waving a sheaf of their grain—their firstfruits—before the Lord at the Feast of Weeks. "This Feast of Weeks actually coincided with the Passover [the very weekend Jesus was crucified and rose again]... It appears that Christ rose from the dead at almost exactly the same time as when the sheaf of the *firstfruits* was being offered in the temple on 16 Nisan, the day after the Sabbath following the Passover. As our *firstfruits*, Jesus is the guarantee of a harvest of life to come."ⁱ

- B. Secondly, the resurrection is the door to the rebellious world set right. Look at **vv.23-24**... These verses are more complex than meets the eye. They spell out a sequence of events, which we naturally want to integrate with other things the Bible teaches about the future. But that's where things get sticky. Since we have many people here who are very astute theologically, let me be clear about the angle I take. I

am a **premillennialist**, as is our denomination and our church. It means that we believe Jesus' second coming will be followed by a literal 1000-year period when Christ will reign on earth with his resurrected people, doing the very thing described here—bringing all things in this world under his authority, including death itself. I will explain this passage from that perspective, although I respect those of you who come at this somewhat differently.

On this we can agree: Christ's resurrection is the beginning of the end, from God's point of view. The point of these verses is that **Christ's resurrection initiated an sequence of events by which all that is in rebellion against God, including death itself, will finally and forever be brought under God's sovereign authority, thanks to the mighty work of Jesus Christ.** Look at the sequence:

1. Christ, the firstfruits, is made alive (v.23a). That happened when Christ arose. Then time passes.
2. "Then, when he comes, those who belong to him" will be made alive (v.23b). Right now, Christians who have died are conscious and present with the Lord, but they do not have their resurrection bodies. Their spirits are alive but their bodies aren't; but they have not yet been *resurrected*. That will happen the moment when Jesus returns. Look at **vv.51-52...**
3. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father..." (v.24a). Before I talk about that, it is the next phrase that adds another stage: *"after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (vv.24b-26). This conquering of all God's enemies happens *before* "Then the end will come." Some believers see this as happening as part of stage 1, Christ's resurrection, because that was the victory blow over all God's enemies. But God's enemies are still at work and people still die. That's why I think this destroying of God's enemies happens after stage 2, the return of Christ and the resurrection of his saints.

The book of Revelation paints a picture of the events at the end of this age. It culminates in Rev. 18 with the destruction of the vast economic system which trades in the *"bodies and souls of men"* [Rev. 18:13]. Rev. 19 begins with the victory celebration in heaven and then the wedding supper of the Lamb, when the church is finally united with her Lord and Lover. Then Christ is portrayed as the Rider on the White Horse, riding out of heaven followed by the armies of heaven—his church again—to conquer the rebellious forces of earth. Rev. 20 says that John next saw a great angel throw Satan into the Abyss and lock him up there for 1000 years. We call that the Millennium. **Rev. 20:4-6** says, *"They [the followers of Christ, and especially the martyrs] came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead [which I take to mean those whose faith was not in Christ] did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."* The chapter goes on to explain that after this 1000 years of Christ's reign on earth Satan is released. He stirs up a great rebellion among those mortals living on earth, and then Christ quashes that rebellion once and for all. Then the judgment comes and sinners are condemned to hell, while according to chaps. 21-22, the new heavens and new earth are established for-ever with God dwelling among is resurrected people.

I believe that all of that is what Paul had in mind when he said here in 1 Cor. 15:24, "after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power..." And *"Then the end will come."* I tell you this because I think it is important that we see that when Christ brings the seen and unseen world to their knees before the Lord, **we will be there!** This is part of the wonder of our resurrection. We will be raised to new life, along with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, to reign with Christ while he subdues God's enemies. We who have put our faith in Christ are destined for great things!

V.25 says Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" and v.27 connects that with a verse of Scripture, **Ps. 8:6:** *"For he 'has put everything under his feet.'"* The interesting thing here is that Ps. 8, where this statement is made, is about mankind, not just about Christ.

(“What is man, that you are mindful of him?”) **Jesus, as the perfect man, fulfills God’s design for mankind through his resurrection.** The only way God could put everything beneath mankind’s feet was to radically change mankind—otherwise we would muck it all up even worse. Jesus Christ, as our Second Adam, is God’s solution. Christ, and us with him as his resurrected saints, will reign over all God has made, under the sovereign authority of God himself.

4. There’s one more stage in the sequence: v.28... Again, in doing this **Jesus is being the perfect man.** He is doing what the first Adam and all his descendants failed to do. God had told Adam and Eve, “*Fill the earth and subdue it,*” and that is what the Second Adam and all his descendants are finally able to do. So that, finally, what should have been true all along, finally becomes true: “*so that God may be all in all.*” And we who have put our faith in the resurrected Christ will be part of that glorious and holy work!

SUMMARY: **The resurrection of Christ is the door to all God has planned for the world to come.** It opens the door (1) to all God’s enemies being defeated, (2) to fulfilling mankind’s creation mandate to “*fill the earth and subdue it,*” and (3) to a world where all mankind gives back to God all we have accomplished so that he might be “*all in all.*” And it is our destiny, as those who have put our faith in Christ, to be there in the middle of all that the resurrection accomplishes.

But what lies through the door of the resurrection now?

II. WALKING THROUGH THE DOOR OF THE RESURRECTION AFFECTS HOW WE LIVE NOW (15:29-34)

- A. We come to the mystifying statement in v.29: “*Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?*” Baptized for the dead?? What in the world does that mean? No one knows for sure. I read that about 40 different explanations have been put forward by Bible scholars. There is no other reference in the Bible or virtually anywhere else, for that matter, to this practice. It is possible that this isn’t even the right way to translate it. Maybe it is meant to say that people were baptized “*with death before their eyes.*” But if this was in fact the practice there, it is certain that it is not the usual way of doing things, for the Bible doesn’t say anything else about it, nor was it ever the tradition of the church. Paul’s greater point is simply this: **baptism is irrelevant without the resurrection.**
Baptism, one of Christianity’s two great ordinances, is based on the resurrection. Going under the water declares that you died with Christ, and coming out of the water declares that you were raised with Christ and are awaiting your ultimate resurrection with a new body. **So one way we walk through the door of the resurrection is to be baptized, as a public testimony of our faith that Christ has brought us from death to life.** Have you been baptized?
- B. Now look at **vv.30-32...** Christianity now is a life of dying. Jesus said, “*Take up your cross and follow me.*” We die to ourselves and to the world around us. Christians face persecution and even death. Paul said, “*We always carry around in our bodies the dying of Jesus.*” But why would you persevere in your faith, why put up with all this dying, this self-sacrifice, this persecution, this weakness, if there is no resurrection? Illus.: The ancient historian, **Herodotus**, tells of a custom of the Egyptians: “*In the social meetings among the rich, when the banquet is ended, a servant carries round to the several guests a coffin, in which there is a wooden image of a corpse... As he shows it to each guest in turn, the servant says, ‘Gaze here, and drink and be merry, for when you die, such you will be.’*”ⁱⁱ For us as believers **the resurrection means we persevere in our faith because tomorrow matters more than today.**
- C. Finally, **vv.33-34...** By “*bad company*” he means the people in the church who were minimizing the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ and his people. When he says, “*stop sinning,*” he means it is sin to deny the work of God in the resurrection, and it breeds more sin in our lives. And when he says that such people “*are ignorant of God,*” he means that people who deny the resurrection do not know what God has said about himself, nor what kind of God we really serve. They undermine God’s own

promises, his character, his power and his love. Their theology is a travesty. **We embrace the resurrection as our power for living and our proof of God's character.**

Conclusion

The poem said, *"Let us walk through the door."* On the other side of the tomb's door is all that God has planned for the world to come, and every reason we need for living as Christians in the world now.

ⁱ Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Resurrection*, p.130-131

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.134